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BOLIVIA: New Threat to the Regime

*General Garcia Meza's new campaign to eradicate the country's illegal narcotics industry seems to have put him in an untenable position.* ■

Garcia Meza has been under intense pressure from prominent regimental commanders to end the government's countenance of cocaine trafficking, which they believe is blocking the normalization of relations with the US. He has reacted by giving the armed forces responsibility for combating the drug trade. The commander of a key armored unit, Colonel Doria Medina, is heading the campaign and has been given sweeping powers. ■

Many senior officials have close ties to major drug dealers--especially Interior Minister Arce, commander of a large paramilitary force and an ally of both the traffickers and Garcia Meza. If Garcia Meza continues his alliance with Arce, his strongest protector, it would make a travesty of the antinarcotics campaign. Should the campaign fail, however, Garcia Meza probably would lose his military support and be ousted. ■

Doria Medina and Arce now seem certain to clash. A bloody encounter between the paramilitary forces of Arce and the traffickers on one side and the military on the other also could cost Garcia Meza his job. ■

Whatever happens, Doria Medina appears to have put himself in a strong position to take power. His presidential ambitions probably will be enhanced by widespread approval for his antinarcotics efforts. ■

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